

Maine History

Volume 46
Number 2 *Land and Labor*

Article 3

6-1-2012

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Recommended Citation

Burns Martin, Cynthia. "The Bodwell Granite Company Store and the Community of Vinalhaven, Maine, 1859-1919." *Maine History* 46, 2 (2012): 149-168. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol46/iss2/3>

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THE BODWELL GRANITE COMPANY STORE AND THE COMMUNITY OF VINALHAVEN, MAINE, 1859-1919

BY CYNTHIA BURNS MARTIN

From the late 1850s to the late 1910s, Bodwell Granite Company on Vinalhaven Island operated a Company Store from which employees could purchase a wide variety of consumer goods. In the early decades of its existence, the Company Store was generally popular with the company's employees and the island community. Because of certain competitive advantages, and because the company was guaranteed a profit through federal contracts, the company store often had lower prices than its competitors. But by the late nineteenth century, the store's prices were often higher than its competitors and the store became part of the growing rift between granite workers and the Bodwell Granite Company. The Company Store's sixty-one-year history has been well preserved thanks to the Candage Collection, housed at the Vinalhaven Historical Society. This collection is a significant group of corporate documents associated with the Company Store for one of New England's largest granite mining companies. It includes ledgers and account books, inventory and order books, correspondence, shipping documents, bills of lading, and thousands of redeemed trade tickets. The author is a Professor of Business Administration at New England College in Henniker, New Hampshire. A 2008 exhibit at the Vinalhaven Historical Society was based on her research on the Bodwell Granite Company Store, and was made possible with financial support from the Maine Humanities Council, the Vinalhaven Historical Society, and the Gilmore Fund.

IN 1852, Moses Webster, S.G. Webster, and Joseph Bodwell formed a partnership and assumed operation of the East Boston quarry on the island of Vinalhaven, Maine. The company was incorporated in 1871 and operated thereafter as Bodwell Granite Company. This company eventually became the largest employer on Vinalhaven Island, where it employed up to 1,500 men at one time.¹ In 1859 Moses Webster and his partners opened a company-owned general store which offered groceries, dry goods, and hardware for his employees and other townspeople.² In the mid-nineteenth century, company stores were operated



Vinalhaven's population expanded rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century thanks to the island's quarries. Quarrymen did some of the most difficult work for the company, but were among the lowest paid workers. Despite their hard work, many struggled to make ends meet. Courtesy of the Vinalhaven Historical Society.

by numerous companies in the lumber and mining industries in the United States, in order to provide essential goods to workers. In many towns, company stores were the only retailers in the area and faced no competition.³ In the early years, the Company Store at Vinalhaven was a central meeting place and social hub of the community. In later years, it became part of a widening divide between labor and company management. This company store's rise and fall, as well as its changing role in the community, were heavily influenced by changes in the political and macroeconomic environments, over which the company had no control.

The company store was a longstanding institution in England, where the "truck" system provided workers with necessary food, clothing, other goods, and housing, in exchange for labor. The term "truck"



Based on the store sign, this image probably predates 1871, the year the company changed its name from Bodwell Webster Company to Bodwell Granite Company. The impressive house at the head of Main Street was built by Moses Webster, one of Bodwell Granite Company's founders. Courtesy of the Vinalhaven Historical Society.



The Bodwell Granite Company Store moved to this building in 1879. The Masonic Block building was constructed in high Victorian style, ornamented with elongated second floor windows, mansard roof, Greek key moldings, and Italianate pediments. The total cost of the lot, foundation, cellar, and building was \$11,515.42. Courtesy of the Vinalhaven Historical Society.

may be an adaptation of the French verb *troquer*, “to barter.” Under the truck system, employers established company stores from which employees could make purchases utilizing credit earned for work done. The truck system lent itself to various kinds of abuse since it allowed an employer control over both wages *and* employee expenditures. The first legal attempt to regulate the truck system occurred in England, in 1464, with an act mandating payment in money, not goods, to carders, spinners, and others engaged in cloth making. Later laws in England and continental Europe attempted to regulate the truck system in the woolen industry and coal mining.⁴ However, no such laws regulated the truck system in Maine in the mid-nineteenth century, when the Bodwell Granite Company Store opened its doors.

Vinalhaven’s population expanded rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century as the prospect of jobs at the island’s quarries lured manual laborers and skilled stonemasons from other parts of Maine, as well as New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts.⁵ By 1870, five general stores on the island competed for a market of 1,851 consumers. Sole proprietors Timothy Lane, W.V. Lane, E.L. Roberts, and David Vinal had neither the economies of scale nor the captive market that fostered the growth of Bodwell Granite Company Store.⁶ In 1872, Bodwell Granite Company reported \$5,000 worth of “stock in trade in store” on the town tax lists and two years later, the Company Store tripled the value of its merchandise.⁷ Eventually, the general store evolved into a department store, with separate books for several departments.⁸ In 1879, the Company Store relocated to the impressive new Masonic Block building which dominated the central shopping district. In 1889, Bodwell Granite Company valued its merchandise inventory at \$11,000 in the grocery store, \$6,000 in the dry goods store, \$2,000 for six hundred tons of coal, \$60 for twenty cords of wood, and \$900 for seventy thousand board feet of lumber.⁹

A Venue for Socialization

The sudden arrival of a large industrial employer in the mid-nineteenth century, followed by hundreds of itinerant male laborers, altered the make-up of the close-knit Vinalhaven community of fishermen and farmers, in which social position was established over generations and depended largely on ancestry and acres of farmland. Prior to the granite boom, Vinalhaven had a moderately diverse economy in which the dominant occupations of fisherman, shoresman, mariner, seine, and net maker were related to the sea.¹⁰ The cultural values of coastal Maine in-

cluded an emphasis on independence, self-sufficiency, resentment of government control, and mistrust of outsiders.¹¹ Length and purity of island bloodlines remain key determinants of social position to the present day, with fine distinctions in rank related to varying degrees of being “from away,” described humorously, but accurately, by islander Phil Crossman, in his book *Away Happens*.¹²

However, there is little evidence of social resistance to the influx of outsiders, even as Bodwell Granite Company went farther and farther afield to recruit experienced stoneworkers, first from elsewhere in New England, then from the British Isles and Scandinavia. By 1880, Vinalhaven’s population included numerous immigrants from Scotland, Ireland, and Nova Scotia, along with a few Swedes.¹³ By 1900, the population also included a number of Finnish quarry workers.¹⁴ The newcomers posed no economic threat to the original island population. They neither competed for resources nor interfered with the activities of fishing and farming. In fact, the larger population meant increased demand for fish and farm products. Because many of the newcomers were of northwestern European background, assimilation occurred fairly rapidly and peacefully. In addition, some local men found work in the quarries and some immigrant granite workers married island women, both of which undoubtedly helped the assimilation process.¹⁵

The large Company Store was the hub of the community and a venue for socialization in close quarters as the shoppers waited in line for the next sales clerk. Detailed record books for the Company Store at Vinalhaven provide a narrative of the store’s history, showing Vinalhaven’s fishermen and farmers rubbing elbows with newer arrivals to the island as transactions are listed in chronological order. Different customers did not always pay the same price for the same item on the same day, which is not particularly surprising since, in the nineteenth century, prices were often negotiated between storekeepers and customers.¹⁶

Employer and Employees Shared a Preference for Credit

During the early years, Bodwell Granite Company made cash payments to workers infrequently and intermittently. Between paydays, the company advanced negotiable credit to workers on the company account books or in the form of cardboard scrip trade tickets, locally known as “credit cards,” redeemable at the Company Store and at company-owned boarding houses. At the end of a pay period, workers received cash for credit balances on account or unredeemed trade tickets.¹⁷

Employer and employees may have shared a preference for credit



Cash payments to employees were infrequent. Instead, the company advanced negotiable credit to workers on the company account books or in the form of cardboard scrip trade tickets that were redeemable at the Company Store and at company-owned boarding houses. Pictured here is a 3.00 trade ticket with a balance of \$.12 cash paid to worker Allen Foster in 1896. Courtesy of the Vinalhaven Historical Society.

transactions in the first few years the Company Store was open for business.¹⁸ After the Second Bank of the United States' federal charter expired in 1836, there was no uniform national currency until the National Banking Act was passed by Congress in 1863; rather, there was a plethora of bank notes printed in different colors, sizes, and denominations, issued by thousands of private banks.¹⁹ Domestic exchange rates were highly volatile and bank failures frequent, resulting in low confidence in cash. The resultant fluctuations in the money supply made regular payment of cash wages difficult for employers.²⁰ A credit system continued to be attractive even after 1861, when the federal government began printing Greenbacks, which increased confidence in currency as a medium of exchange. Because of frequent bank failures, it was difficult to secure cash in company towns where itinerant manual laborers crowded together in cheap rooms in large boarding houses. E.H. Lawry, Secretary for Bodwell Granite Company, wrote to the Vinalhaven works on February 27, 1879, that he was sending \$5,500 "in currency and fractional silver" and advised that the company treasurer Francis Cobb "wishes this put up and paid out as soon as possible, as he does not think it advisable to keep larger amounts on hand."²¹ It was not until 1887 that the state of Maine passed a law mandating fortnightly monetary pay for workers in companies with more than ten employees, thereby reducing the need for long-term credit and big balances at the Company Store.²²

Trade tickets and scrip were in such wide use that a number of companies specialized in machinery for stamping wooden and metal coinage with company logos and printing cardboard trade tickets.²³ Some company scrip was redeemable by the bearer and traded freely in local economies, either at face value or with a small discount to compensate for any restrictions on redemption locations. However, scrip from Bodwell Granite Company was marked “non-transferable” and could not be redeemed by anyone but the Bodwell employee, which insured a captive market for the Company Store.²⁴ The primary factor determining whether a worker was actually compelled to shop at the Bodwell Granite Company Store was whether the worker had sufficient cash for household expenditures between paydays. Workers who ran short of cash between paydays due to low wages, large families, or seasonal employment were more likely to use credit at the Company Store, while more affluent workers with cash in hand were free to shop at any of the village stores.

Skill and ethnic origin largely determined a worker’s socioeconomic status in the granite industry. At the top of the hierarchy were the skilled carvers and stonecutters who worked year round under the shelter of the great Polishing Shed. In the middle were paving cutters who had sufficient experience and skill and an eye for “motions” in stone, to cut identical blocks to the proper dimensions for city streets. At the bottom were the quarrymen who blasted and removed great slabs of stone from the walls of the quarries. They worked ten hours a day in the summer sun and were often laid off in winter months.²⁵ The Bureau of Industrial Labor Statistics reported that in the state of Maine in 1889:

The granite cutters are about 70 per cent American born. As a class these men are in comfortable circumstances; the large majority of them are the possessors of farms and no homes are more comfortably furnished. Pianos and elegant furnishings are no rarity in the homes of the granite cutters of Maine....The paving cutters, of whom there are about 1,000 in the State, are a different class of men from the stone cutters; 75 per cent of these are foreigners, mostly Scotch. Their work leads them from one place to another and they are constantly on the move. A large portion of them are single. The married men generally settle down; they make about the same wages as the stone cutters, and are usually comfortable and well informed....The quarrymen are the poorest paid of any of the granite workers, and although they have to work out of doors exposed to heat and cold alike, they do not receive, on an average, much more than half as much as the stone cutters or paving cutters. There is just as much intelligence required in the quarry as in the shed, and yet the quarryman at .15 or .17 ½ per hour, is

obliged to lose all bad weather while the stone cutter at .27 ½ or .30 per hour can work every day if he will. The causes of this may be summed up in these words: The stone cutters and paving cutters are organized, the quarrymen are not. Of course, the quarrymen have to live on their incomes, but there are very few of them, especially those who try to maintain the American standard of living, or who have others depending on them, that more than pay their bills and many of them cannot do that.²⁶

The most common charge against company stores is that a captive market necessarily leads to exploitation through inflated prices. For example, in the 1880s, an unidentified paving cutter from Maine complained to the Industrial Labor Board that “we do our trading at a company store and are restricted by circumstances from buying elsewhere. This is highly detrimental to my interest. I know that this system is injurious to all of us. When other stores and traders sell goods cheaper we cannot take advantage of it and have to pay in many cases from ten to twenty five per cent more for our necessities.”²⁷ However, not all company stores charged extortionate prices. Economist Price V. Fishback has demonstrated that prices at company stores in the coal mining industry were generally similar to prices at nearby independent stores and postulated that company stores were more profitable than independent stores due to advantages associated with vertical integration, particularly in markets where there was competition.²⁸ From the start, Bodwell Granite Company Store competed with other general stores, specialty stores, and neighborhood shops for the business of the general population on Vinalhaven, in addition to serving a captive market of Bodwell Granite Company employees. There is ample evidence that Bodwell Granite Company’s buyer, E.P. Walker, kept a close eye on the price of inventory. For example, in December 1878, while in Boston, he wrote company store manager, J.J. Lane and advised, “Pork at 7 c Mess 6 – granulated sugar to day costs 9 c. Sell Ham 10c. Flour is still a little higher.”²⁹

The Company Store exercised some powerful competitive advantages. Unlike independent stores, the Company Store could offer credit to employees without assuming risk of bad debt. The Company Store also had lower costs for inventory and freight. Inventory was purchased in volume for three company stores associated with Bodwell Granite Company quarries at Vinalhaven, Spruce Head, and Jonesboro, so Walker had leverage when negotiating with vendors in Portland, Boston, and New York.³⁰ There was no additional cost for freight when inventory could be delivered to the Company Store via company-owned schooners returning from granite deliveries. Consequently, the Company Store did

not need to price above market in order to be more profitable than the competition. Thus, in 1866 and 1867, for example, Company Store prices on staple items of sugar, eggs, milk, soap, crackers and soup beef were 11 percent lower than average prices at Rockland, the nearest mainland town.³¹

The Cost of Managing a Household on a Granite Worker's Pay

Based on the number of granite workers that flocked to Vinalhaven, Bodwell Granite Company wages were competitive, even though those wages look very low by twenty-first century standards. In the late nineteenth century, Bodwell Granite Company hourly wages were paid in pennies and half pennies.³² In 1889, for example, those wages were:

| | <i>Low</i> | <i>High</i> |
|---|------------|-------------|
| Granite cutters | 27 ½ | 30 |
| Quarrymen | 15 | 17 ½ |
| First derrick men, breakers and men who handle powder | 20 | 20 |
| Boxers (men who box the cut stone) | 17 ½ | 17 ½ |
| Teamsters | 18 | 22 |

At these rates, it took many hours of work for a quarryman to meet the cost of living in June and July of that same year.³³

| | Average Rate for Labor | | | <i>Hours</i> |
|---------------------|------------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|
| | <i>Unit</i> | <i>Price</i> | <i>Quarryman</i> | |
| Rent | month | \$5.00 | 0.16 | 31.00 |
| Board | week | \$4.00 | 0.16 | 25.00 |
| Butter | pound | \$0.27 | 0.16 | 2.00 |
| Lard | pound | \$0.10 | 0.16 | 0.50 |
| Salt Pork | pound | \$0.10 | 0.16 | 0.50 |
| Sugar | pound | \$0.10 | 0.16 | 0.50 |
| Tea | pound | \$0.50 | 0.16 | 3.00 |
| Roast Beef | pound | \$0.11 | 0.16 | 0.50 |
| Beefsteak | pound | \$0.18 | 0.16 | 1.00 |
| Yellow Beans | peck | \$1.00 | 0.16 | 6.00 |
| Eggs | dozen | \$0.18 | 0.16 | 1.00 |
| Flour, best quality | barrel | \$7.25 | 0.16 | 45.00 |
| Coal | ton | \$7.00 | 0.16 | 43.00 |
| Wood, hard | Cord | \$6.38 | 0.16 | 39.00 |

Sales order books for the Company Store offer many clues about nineteenth century household management. Purchases at the Company Store were made in larger quantities than is common today. In 1859,



Skilled carvers and stonecutters were at the top of the hierarchy of workers at Bodwell Granite Company. They worked year-round under the shelter of the great Polishing Shed, pictured here in the late nineteenth century. Courtesy of the Vinalhaven Historical Society.

William H. Paige or his wife bought fifty-seven dozen eggs from the Company Store from April through September but he did not buy any eggs at all in the dark days from October through March, when eggs are scarce and prices are high.³⁴ The Paiges probably preserved summer eggs for use during winter months, either by sealing the eggs with a fat, like lard, or by immersing them in “waterglass,” a solution of sodium silicate. Products sold in large quantities were delivered to the buyer’s house by a delivery wagon known as a “jigger.” Molasses was the preferred sweetening and was sold by the gallon. Flour was purchased by the barrel and most households purchased multiple barrels each year. Saleratus, or baking soda, was a household essential in a time when biscuits were served at nearly every meal. Tobacco was sold by the pound and a lot of it was sold at Vinalhaven. In the nineteenth century, chewing tobacco gained favor, particularly among workmen in shops where flammable materials posed a risk.³⁵

Sales order books for the Company Store also offer poignant glimpses into the rituals of family life. Four days after their marriage on January 3, 1885, twenty-four year old Quincy R. Maker and his new bride Sarah started housekeeping with a long list of purchases at Bod-

well Granite Company Store: two bedsteads, two mattresses, a pair of pillows, a table and a half dozen chairs, a rocker, a broom, a mop head, a mirror, a clock, eighteen plates, a dozen cups and saucers, a glass "sett," three bowls, a water pitcher, nappies, a bean pot, a knife and fork set, a glass caster, a half dozen tablespoons, a bread pan, a dish pan, two water pails, a tin spittoon, an axe and handle, a saw, miscellaneous pots and jars, a half dozen tin pie plates, a dust pan, two wash tubs, a wash board, a lamp, a barrel of flour, bean pots, two gallons of molasses, a two-gallon jug, five pounds of sugar, five pounds of lard, two pounds of butter, six and a half pounds of pork, five quarts of beans, one pound of tea, one quarter pound each of pepper, ginger, pimento, cloves, cassia and nutmeg, one quart of vinegar, a jug, a half bushel of apples, one pound of soda, five and three-quarters pounds of beef, and several other items that are indecipherable at the end of the long, handwritten list. The Makers may have come to the store with friends and family members buying wedding gifts for the new couple, since subsequent purchases reflect an unusual number of household durables immediately following the Maker transaction.³⁶

William H. Paige's second wife, Maranda Calderwood, purchased a lot of dry goods during a seven-month period in 1859, five years after her marriage to the much-older widower, a manager who was employed by Moses Webster Company (later Bodwell Granite Company) from its first day of operation on Vinalhaven.³⁷ The household included the Paige's three year-old son, plus two daughters and a son from Mr. Paige's first marriage.³⁸ Thirty-six yards of delaine, three yards of velveteen, and one half-yard of velvet were made into fancy dresses. Ninety yards of print and twenty-eight yards of cambric made house dresses. A yard of lawn may have made a set of collars and cuffs. Towels were made from "crash" and napkins from a yard of linen. Bed sheets were manufactured at home from the eighty-four yards of sheeting. Feather pillows and straw tick mattresses were manufactured from twenty-four yards of ticking. Nightgowns were made from twenty-four yards of flannel. Along with the fabrics, Mrs. Paige purchased twelve dozen-buttons, along with braid and other trimmings. The Paiges also purchased numerous pairs of ready-made boots, shoes, gloves, suspenders, hats, a bonnet, and shawl. One can only speculate whether all the dry goods were purchased for self adornment, for a home dressmaking business, or for a trousseau for stepdaughter Sarah Paige, married early the following year.³⁹ On November 13, 1859, Mrs. Paige purchased a set of furs for \$10.00, a very significant sum of money at the time. It was her last big extravagance of the year. One can only imagine her husband's reaction. A few weeks later,

the family's monthly purchases fell dramatically when the quarries fell silent with the onset of winter.

Frugality was necessary for households in more modest circumstances. On Christmas Eve, 1870, stone cutter George W. Burns went to the Company Store and purchased slippers for \$1.25, gloves for \$1.25, a brush and comb set for \$1.00, shears for \$.50 and a set of glassware for \$1.00.⁴⁰ One imagines these were probably gifts for his wife Sarah (Paige) Burns or for the Burns' children, Willie and Lizzie. That Christmas, Burns was a twenty-nine-year-old veteran who had served with the Second Maine Battalion from December 1861 to June 1865 and fought in some of the most violent battles of the Civil War, including Gettysburg.⁴¹ While he was off to war, his wife Sarah received government support from the state of Maine and the town of Vinalhaven in the form of credits against her store bill.⁴² On June 3, 1865, Sarah purchased one and three-eighths yards of ribbon at the Company Store, perhaps decorating to welcome her husband home to Vinalhaven.⁴³

Burns returned from years of combat with a strong dislike for authority. Perpetually in debt to his employer, Burns deeply resented his financial dependence on Bodwell Granite Company, which held the mortgage on his house and his large bill at the Company Store. He invented an adhesive called "bummicky," which he sold to fellow stone cutters who used it to repair defects and get stone past the foreman's inspection.⁴⁴ He died a slow and difficult death from silicosis (inhaled stone dust which settles in the lungs) or "stonecutter's consumption" (opportunistic bacterial infection secondary to silicosis). Having escaped unharmed from so many bloody battles, he must have been bitter indeed, knowing his death was caused by dust from the Bodwell quarries that settled in his lungs while he cut stone in the East Boston Quarry and the Great Shed. Years later, Vinalhaven native Augusta Clayter remarked, "Of course a lot of the men who worked in the quarry got TB. You knew very well when a man went into stonecutting, he likely would end up having TB."⁴⁵ During the last year of George Burns' life, the town of Vinalhaven forgave his taxes but Bodwell Granite Company did not forgive the mortgage and the store bill. After his death, his widow was left dependent on her children for support. The simmering resentment Burns harbored against his employer was shared by other granite workers. Eventually, circumstances would bring the simmering pot to a boil.

Changing Labor Relations

In the mid-nineteenth century, the granite industry prospered on federal contracts which guaranteed a lucrative 15 percent profit margin



The Bodwell Granite Company Store, pictured here around 1900, was established to serve the consumer needs of Bodwell employees. Store prices could sometimes be a divisive issue. Courtesy of the Vinalhaven Historical Society.

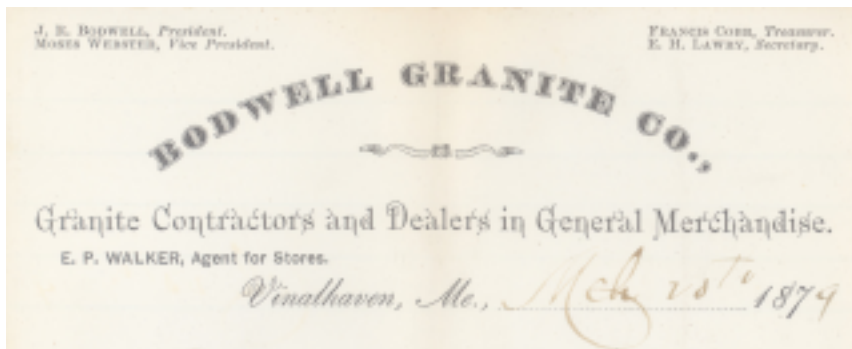
over cost. Industrialization and urbanization gave rise to new cities built with granite post offices and court houses and office buildings. City streets were paved with granite. Forts, dams, bridges, breakwaters, and lighthouses were erected with granite. After the Civil War, government contracts raised granite memorials and monuments and new federal buildings in the South. Under the 15-percent contract system, granite contractors maximized their own profits through liberal expenditures for wages and other operating costs. Bodwell Granite Company flourished and relations between labor and management were generally cooperative during this period. The few disputes that arose between Bodwell Granite Company and its employees were settled out of court.⁴⁶ A measure of the company's influence is that no lawsuits were filed by injured workers or their heirs against Bodwell Granite Company until 1909, even though contemporary newspapers document numerous industrial accidents at Vinalhaven quarries and claims against employers for industrial accidents were increasingly common in late nineteenth century New England.⁴⁷ It is possible that the company made private settlements related to industrial accidents at the company's quarries but no evidence of such settlements has been found.

In 1876, Bodwell Granite Company laid off 300 granite workers, which contributed to formation of the Granite Cutters National Union,



George W. Burns, a stone cutter for Bodwell, had a strong dislike of authority. Often in debt to his employers because of high Company Store prices, Burns died a bitter man and left behind a widow and children in debt to the company. Courtesy of the Vinalhaven Historical Society.

headquartered at Rockland, early the next year.⁴⁸ That same spring, the federal government abandoned the 15-percent contract system when United States Attorney General Charles Devens declared it illegal.⁴⁹ In this new environment, granite contractors were forced to bid competitively for jobs and could only improve their profit margins and protect the interests of shareholders by controlling all costs, including wages. Maine's "Granite Ring," a tightly-knit group of quarry owners which included General Davis Tillson, Mark St. John, C.A. Dixon, and J.R. Bodwell, focused their attention on cost control and company stores faced new pressure to operate as profit centers. As a result, the interests of labor and management diverged over wages and the company store. In April 1878, workers struck at Bodwell Granite Company's Vinalhaven works. The strikers insisted they would be "paid regularly and in cash



Bodwell Granite Company letterhead, 1879. Courtesy of the Vinalhaven Historical Society.

and not out of the store.”⁵⁰ This was not surprising since prices at Bodwell Granite Company Store were 21 percent higher than at Rockland, the nearest mainland town, for staples like butter, flour, molasses, sugar, and tea.⁵¹ A letter to the editor of the pro-union *Rockland Opinion* stated, “Now, Mr. Editor, you may see how the Bodwell Granite Company has ‘benefited’ this place. It has paid big wages at times, but kept the money back from the men three or four months, thus obliging them to trade at its store, and so got the money pretty much all back, besides getting the work of the men.”⁵² Soon thereafter, Bodwell Granite Company began an aggressive new practice of litigation to recover balances on account from workers and former employees, likely debt incurred for rent or purchases at the Company Store. Most of the defendants defaulted and the court always decided in favor of the plaintiff, Bodwell Granite Company.⁵³

In the late nineteenth century, company owners and managers faced increasing challenges as the granite industry slowly declined over several decades that were punctuated by periodic union action and management retaliation, economic panic and depression. Cash flow had to be carefully managed to meet new legal requirements for fortnightly payment.⁵⁴ Accusations about monopolistic practices of company stores continued in the pro-labor press. In 1889, the Maine State Bureau of Industrial Labor Statistics noted that at Bodwell Granite Company’s Spruce Head quarry, “a store is run in connection with the works, prices being about the same as at other places where a monopoly of the trade is had.”⁵⁵ A comparison of prices at Bodwell Granite Company Store and nearby mainland locations reveals that the pattern of above-market prices continued, albeit with some variance in the premium.⁵⁶ In 1889,

Vinalhaven Company Store sales books reveal that prices of yellow beans, corned beef, butter, eggs, flour, sugar and tea averaged 8 percent above prices at Rockland.⁵⁷ In the wake of the Great Lockout strike of 1892, Company Store prices averaged 14 percent higher than at Rockland for a breadbasket of twenty-three food items.⁵⁸

As the quarries fell silent, granite workers began to leave Vinalhaven and all retailers faced a difficult situation. In 1900, twenty-six merchants served a population of 2,358. Twenty years later, Bodwell Granite Company Store found itself competing with twenty-eight other merchants for a population that had declined by 17 percent.⁵⁹ By 1917, the Treasury Department had decided that Indiana limestone should be used for construction of many public buildings and demand for granite had declined significantly. Only the largest federal projects in areas showing post-office receipts of \$800,000 or more could be constructed of granite or marble alone. Although this policy was modified later in 1917 to allow construction of smaller buildings using a combination of stones, granite contractors had lost a major share of their market. They also faced new competition in the form of “artificial stone,” or concrete. The Granite Era ended, along with Bodwell Granite Company.⁶⁰ At the end of 1918, Bodwell Granite Company announced the impending closure of the Company Store. Over a twelve-day period, the store liquidated its merchandise and closed its doors for the last time on January 16, 1919.⁶¹ On that same day, when the quarry whistle blew at noon, Bodwell Granite Company’s quarries at Vinalhaven ceased operations forever.⁶²

The Company Store’s fate was tied to the fate of the parent company. Bodwell Granite Company rose on the tide of industrialization, urbanization, and post-Civil War reconstruction, and then declined in response to legislative decisions made in Washington. The Company Store’s role in the community changed as management responded to changes in the business environment. In the early years, Bodwell Granite Company Store was mutually beneficial to workers and management, since it facilitated transactions without the risks associated with currency. Workers also liked that the Company Store offered credit in the lengthy periods between paydays and a wide array of products. However, legislative changes made far from the little island of Vinalhaven determined the fate of Bodwell Granite Company Store. The national currency and mandated fortnightly payment reduced workers’ need for a company store. Abolition of the 15-percent contract system shifted management’s tactics from padding expenses to maximizing profits at the expense of the workers, polarizing the interests of labor and manage-

ment and fostering unionization. When the Treasury Department changed specifications for federal building contracts, demand for granite plummeted. The Granite Ring lacked sufficient lobbying power in Washington to prevent these changes, which eventually led to the end of the granite industry in the state of Maine.

NOTES

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2. Bodwell Webster Company ledger, July 12, 1858- March 7, 1860, p. 1, Candage Collection, Vinalhaven Historical Society, Vinalhaven, Maine; M. Webster and Company account book, March 1855-April 1861, Candage Collection, Vinalhaven Historical Society (hereafter VHS), Vinalhaven, Maine.
3. Price V. Fishback, "Did Coal Miners 'Owe Their Souls to the Company Store'? Theory and Evidence from the Early 1900s," *The Journal of Economic History* 46 (December 1986): 1012.
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42. Bodwell Granite Company, "State Aid," ledger book, p. 11, in Candage Collection, VHS.
43. Bodwell Granite Company, "State Aid," ledger book, p. 11, in Candage Collection, VHS.
44. Robert E. Burns (descendant of George W. Burns), interview by author, May 19, 2009.
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51. Bureau of Industrial Labor Statistics, State of Maine, *Annual Report* (Portland, ME: Hoyt, Fogg and Donham, 1876; Sales Order Book for Bodwell Granite Company, May 11-June 26 1876, and June 12-August 23, 1876, Candage Collection, VHS.
52. *Rockland Opinion*, January 17, 1877.
53. Supreme Judicial Court of Knox County, Maine: *Bodwell Granite Co. v. Merrithew* 426 (1881), *Bodwell Granite Co. v. Gregory* 427 (1881), *Bodwell Granite Co. v. Coombs* 428 (1881), *Bodwell Granite Co. v. Corliss* 429 (1881), *Bodwell Granite Co. v. Brown* 430 (1881), *Bodwell Granite Co. v. Beverage* 431 (1881), *Bodwell Granite Co. v. Merrithew* 432 (1881), *Bodwell Granite Co. v. Allen* 311 (1881), *Bodwell Granite Co. v. Calderwood* 458 (1881), *Bodwell Granite Co. v. Fuller* 459 (1881), *Bodwell Granite Co. v. Saunders* 401 (1882), *Bodwell Granite Co. v. Goodhue* 404 (1882), *Bodwell Granite Co. v. Elwell* 336 (1882).

54. Scontras, *Organized Labor and Labor Politics in Maine, 1880-1890*, p. 84.
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58. Bureau of Industrial Labor Statistics, State of Maine, *Annual Report* (Portland, ME: Hoyt, Fogg and Donham, 1894); Sales Order Book for Bodwell Granite Company, March 22-September 14, 1893, Candage Collection, VHS; Benjamin Glover, unpublished undergraduate research notes on prices extracted from Bodwell Granite Company Store ledgers, (New England College 2008); calculations by author.
59. "Vinalhaven, State of Maine," *Census of the United States* (1900); "Vinalhaven, State of Maine," *Census of the United States* (1920); *Register of Maine* (Portland, ME: Hoyt and Fogg, 1899-1900); *Register of Maine* (Portland, ME: Hoyt and Fogg, 1919-20).
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